

ACE Basin Economic Forum

Healthy Economy, Healthy Environment

*An Action Agenda for
Compatible Economic Development*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Over the past year, more than 100 Colleton County residents and other interested individuals have worked hundreds of hours helping to prepare the county and the ACE Basin for the years ahead. The forum includes individuals with a wide range of interests and backgrounds who participated in numerous meetings, a day-long retreat, task groups, and a final review session. The process was overseen by an 8-person Steering Committee and sponsored by the Colleton County Resource and Development Board, the Walterboro-Colleton County Chamber of Commerce, the Colleton County Council, the Lowcountry Council of Governments and The Nature Conservancy. The Pew Charitable Trusts, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Hillsdale Fund, S.C. Forestry Commission and U.S. Forest Service funded the work. The Corporation for Enterprise Development, a nonprofit economic development consulting firm, provided advice and professional assistance.

After working together for twelve months, the group has created an action agenda for compatible development which it believes will foster job creation and business development, while still protecting the area's unique natural resources and rural way of life.

Indeed, our work has been underpinned by three guiding principles:

- Economic development and environmental conservation are not mutually exclusive —instead, they can be mutually reinforcing.
- Conservation of natural resources and protection of the environment can lead to economic opportunity for local residents.
- Economic development need not lead to environmental damage and loss of natural and cultural heritage.

This view is not wishful thinking. We found here, in Colleton County and the ACE Basin, just like elsewhere in the nation, that those concerned about jobs and those dedicated to resource conservation can discover ways to find common ground across their respective agendas and develop solutions for mutual benefit.

Furthermore, achieving this vision of compatible development must be guided by a clear sense of the values that we seek to support and enhance in our community. They include:

- **Expanding opportunity**
- **Increasing self-sufficiency**
- **Preserving our heritage**
- **Conserving the environment**



The action agenda presents a plan for economic vitality while conserving the area's cultural and natural assets. The McLeod house (ca. 1835), is among the fine homes found in Walterboro's historic district, a major tourism attraction in Colleton County. Photo by Ron Anton Rocz.



The Edisto Nature Trail, located in Jacksonboro, welcomes visitors to the ACE Basin, a region rich in biological and historic resources. Photo by Michael Prevost.

Based on our task group planning process and the research conducted by our consultants, we recommend that our area's leadership tackle three strategic priorities:

- *Strategy one: Create a framework for responsible growth*
- *Strategy two: Enhance the awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the ACE Basin*
- *Strategy three: Promote environmentally-compatible business development*

The Action Agenda

Working in task groups, community residents have forged an action agenda for building a vibrant economy, while preserving our natural and cultural heritage.

Strategy one: Create a framework for responsible growth

- **Develop a comprehensive land use plan and a supportive ordinance**
- **Develop an integrated development, tourism, and resource management plan**

Strategy two: Enhance the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the ACE Basin

- **Develop a visitor/interpretive center in the ACE Basin near US Highway 17**

- **Support the Scenic Parkway Concept Plan and designation effort**
- **Develop a consistent ACE Basin graphic identity that would apply to all brochures, maps and other visitor-related materials**
- **Support a rails-to-trails project**
- **Develop primary and secondary environmental and heritage education programs**
- **Develop college courses on coastal resources planning and economic development**
- **Create educational and awareness programs and materials designed to educate and orient people living in the region about its natural and cultural assets and their value to the region when developed in a sustainable fashion**

Strategy three: Promote environmentally compatible business development

- **Create a business development planning process and initial business feasibility plans for natural resource-based products**
- **Create and implement branding and trademarking of area products**
- **Provide assistance to local businesses in creating business plans and identifying necessary resources to implement those plans**
- **Develop a full-scale marketing plan for natural and cultural resource-based tourism in the region**
- **Build on existing rural tourism efforts and assets**
- **Create management standards for visitor safety and resource impacts for tourism in the ACE Basin**
- **Mobilize business development resources to benefit Colleton County**
- **Establish educational programs for businesses operating in the region on how to operate in an environmentally conscious manner with respect to waste management, wildlife impact and other resource considerations**

Progress on this ambitious agenda will not happen overnight. To succeed, we need to get going today on those initiatives that need to be implemented first, as well as show early results on some of our longer-range goals.

If we are to accomplish our objectives of winning in the marketplace and also preserving our area's quality of life, we need to work together. This plan is not the agenda of one segment of the community – it is and *must be* our game plan.

We need your help. Our agenda for promoting compatible economic development requires building a new partnership for economic opportunity and for quality of life.

Join us.

HEALTHY ECONOMY, HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

EMBRACING THE CHALLENGE

America is not only a country comprised of states and of towns and cities. It is also a nation of regions: the Mississippi Delta, the Deep South, the Chesapeake, the Eastern Shore, the Upper Peninsula, the Four Corners, the ACE Basin.

In many respects, this is the real America. State and local economies are jurisdictional fictions. Cultural identities cross county boundaries. Working ecosystems are larger than the national and state conservation lands, preserves and land trusts that seek to protect their individual environmental integrity.

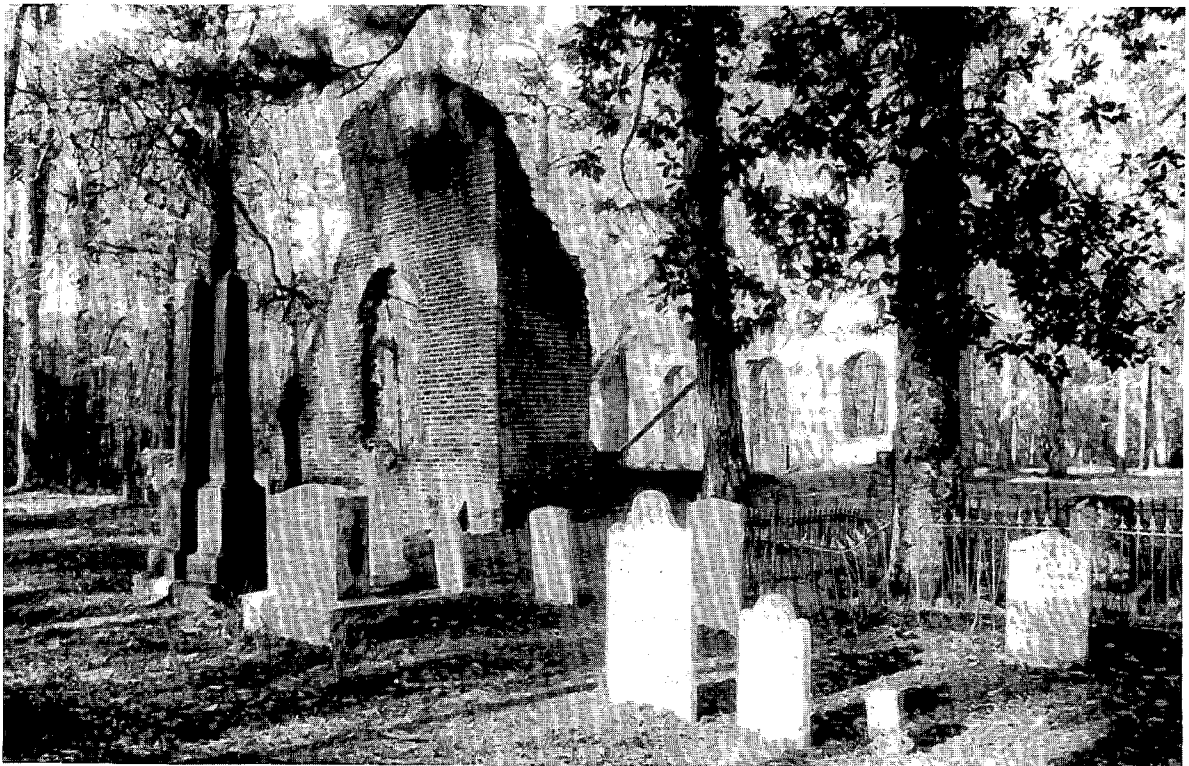
The ACE Basin is no different. Located 45 miles southwest of Charleston, South Carolina, this multi-county region is rich in history and tradition. It is where the Ashepoo, Combahee and Edisto rivers flow into a common embayment, an interlocking web of upland and wetland ecological systems — supporting over 30 types

of natural communities and 1,500 species of plants and animals. Still in a nearly natural condition, the ACE Basin is virtually unpolluted. It has an isolated and undeveloped character that adds to its ecological significance and uniqueness.

Indeed, it is a priority region for habitat protection under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. It is one of 35 world-class conservation sites in The Nature Conservancy's Last Great Places Program. It is a National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Thomas Lovejoy, an internationally famous biologist, an assistant secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, and founder of *Nature*, the most popular long-term series on public television, describes it as "a place where the glories of the South Carolina Lowcountry are at their peak. It is a place for sandpipers and for sand between your toes. It is a place for snakebirds, porpoises, magnificent

The Pon Pon Chapel of Ease (ca. 1706), located near Jacksonboro, represents one of Colleton County's many cultural resources. Photo by Ron Anton RocZ.



cypress trees and waterfowl in abundance. It is a showcase for nature and a wonderful classroom of the glories and importance of wetlands for all who can be induced to come."

But the ACE Basin is more than a natural laboratory. It is also our home — a place where people descended from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds have built their livelihood on its biological riches. Our efforts to create a way of life and a better home for our children have shaped the Basin's history, culture, and sense of identity. Our food, music, settlement patterns, architecture and occupations all subtly reflect the past and our connection with the land.

Our people have taken good care of the Basin's lands. Careful stewardship has left our resources and the ecosystem in excellent condition. Thousands still are employed in and profit from industries that still depend on productive timber, farmlands and waters.

But today the human and non-human inhabitants of the ACE Basin face new challenges. Its natural systems may be threatened in the future by growing numbers of people, misuses of land, water and natural resources and the resulting pollution caused by growth and modern technologies.

The challenges we face are not only environmental in

nature. The area also faces economic difficulties. Poorer than the rest of the state and nation, but doing somewhat better than many similar rural areas, its public and private leadership needs to overcome the obstacles holding back its economic fortunes. These forces include: wide income disparities, an economy which is still mostly low-end and low-wage, weak labor force skills and the need for more governmental and business investment. Yet, there are also factors pushing the region forward: its strong entrepreneurship, its strength in particular industrial sectors, its economic relationship to Charleston, its better than average health and housing resources, its healthy natural resource base and its high quality of life.

How can the citizenry of the ACE Basin area best address these twin challenges? How can we expand our economic opportunities without undermining our natural and cultural assets? How can the job of conservation become an economic development task as well?

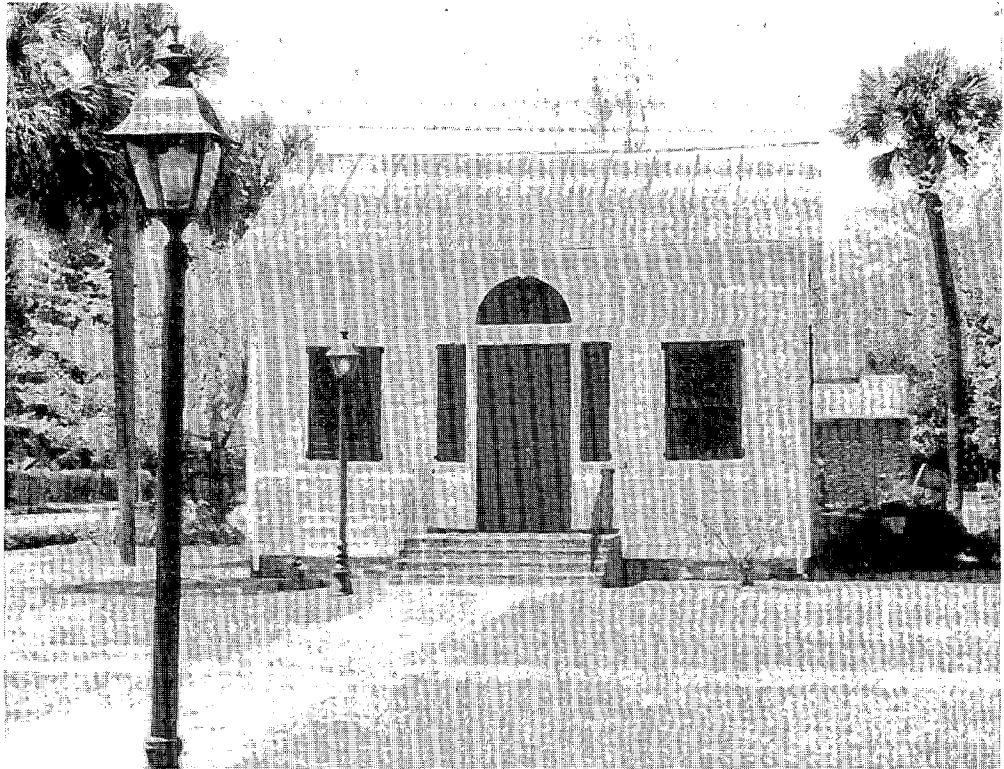
This is the mission that the people of the ACE Basin and especially the residents of Colleton County have tackled. We are choosing to create new working models for promoting more environmentally compatible economic development. The rest of this report describes the background for this decision and maps out the area's new path to prosperity.

The report starts by providing some further information on how it was created. Next, it describes the guiding



The Basin's abundant timber resources are important to the economic base of the region. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources

The Historical Library (ca. 1820), currently located on Wichman Street, was used at its original site to set Walterboro's town boundaries. Photo by Ron Anton Rocz.



principles about the relationship between smart development and wise resource management and outlines the shared vision and values that underpin its proposals. Following this, it grounds its hopes for the future in the real facts about the economic and environmental strengths and weaknesses of the area. It does this by presenting the results of a detailed study of these topics by an external consulting firm. The report closes by outlining the strategic priorities that follow from this analysis and the community's values and dreams for a better future and by summarizing more than a dozen detailed recommendations for promoting environmentally compatible development in the region and in Colleton County.

The ACE Basin Economic Forum in Action

Over the past 12 months, more than 100 Colleton County residents and other interested individuals have worked hundreds of hours helping to prepare the county and the ACE Basin for the years ahead. We have attended a one-day retreat, numerous task group meetings, and final review sessions as part of an action planning process sponsored by the Colleton County Resource and Development Board, the Walterboro-Colleton County Chamber of Commerce, the Colleton County Council, the Lowcountry Council of Governments and The Nature Conservancy and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Hillsdale Fund, S.C. Forestry Commission and U.S. Forest Service. A project steering committee comprised of eight persons together with four task group chairs supervised the process. We sought advice and project assistance from the Washington, D.C.-based Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED), a nonprofit economic development consulting firm, and logistical assistance from the staff of the Colleton County Resource and Development Board.

In many ways the origins of our planning efforts rest on an earlier study, *A Study of the Economic Impact of the ACE Basin Project on Colleton County, South Carolina*, authored by professors at the Department of Economics and Geography at the University of North Florida. The report proposed that "What is now needed is a strategic plan that is focused on economic growth. A strategic plan facilitates the identification of proper goals and objectives for the county, identifies the best strategies for their accomplishment, and encourages frequent revision of both goals and strategies. It is one of the most useful tools a local planner or decision-maker can have at his disposal. It is recommended that a cooperative effort of the Colleton County Council, the Colleton County Resource and Development Board, and the City and County Joint Planning Commission be undertaken to generate such a plan, and to establish a mechanism for updating both the plan and its objectives over time."¹

Thus, the focus for this strategizing effort was to develop a community-based plan for compatible and sustainable economic development in the ACE Basin and the surrounding area. Our goals were:

1. To develop a practical plan for priority action — mapping responsibilities, clear and measurable goals, timelines and an exciting, but realistic vision for the area.

¹ Joseph Perry, Louis Woods, and Jeffrey Steagall, *A Study of the Economic Impact of the ACE Basin Project on Colleton County, S.C.* Pages 4-5. Department of Economics and Geography, University of North Florida-Jacksonville, 1993.

2. To identify priority business opportunities for compatible development.

3. To enable local citizens and public officials to gain a better understanding of the area's economic, social and environmental conditions, and of the potential options for compatible development.

Guiding Principles

This entire project has been driven by a view that the Basin's economic development and conservation agendas can be better meshed together. This perspective is supported by three guiding principles.

- Economic development and environmental conservation are not mutually exclusive —instead, they can be mutually reinforcing.
- Conservation of natural resources and protection of the environment can lead to economic opportunity for local residents.
- Economic development need not lead to environmental damage and loss of natural and cultural heritage.

This view is not wishful thinking. Increasingly, economic development professionals and conservationists are finding common ground across their respective agendas. New environmentally-based industries are gaining market share and constitute strong contenders for tapping overseas markets in developed nations, developing countries and emerging market economies. Some of the fastest growing rural economies are those whose amenities attract tourists and new residents. Waste reduction, energy efficiency, and pollution prevention cut costs for companies and raise profits and productivity. Emerging



The South Carolina Artisans center, located in Walterboro, offers indigenous fine crafts and folk art from more than 300 juried artists, attracting visitors from around the world. Photo by Ron Anton Rocz.

markets for "green" products, healthier foods, and crafts constitute new niches for more profitable use of existing natural resources. Protecting the environment and tapping its resources in a more sustainable fashion can be good business, as well as good conservation.

A Shared Vision

If we are to move beyond the false choices, such as the environment versus jobs, or opportunity versus competitiveness, we need to think outside the old boxes and adopt a different vision for development, one that seeks to better mesh conservation and job creation goals. We see this new mission for development as achieving a *widely shared and sustainable quality of life.*²

What does this mean? How do we know if we are getting there?



The ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge and other public natural resource areas attract visitors from across the country. Photo courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service.

² What is described in the "Shared Vision" section is quite similar to the earlier vision statement authored by the local LEAP planning effort: "Colleton County will enter the 21st Century as a clean, progressive community. The education facilities will be modern, well-equipped, and provide local industries with a labor force equipped to compete world wide. The availability of county wide services such as water, sewer, emergency services, and trash disposal complemented by a wide range of recreational opportunities will result in a high quality of living for residents throughout the county."

This is our vision for the future:

- **Development** Our economy is growing. Our standard of living is rising. We are creating more and better jobs. New firms are forming. Existing enterprises are expanding, modernizing and targeting more profitable market niches. New businesses are being attracted.
- **Shared Development** We are expanding the opportunity to produce. There are greater opportunities for local residents to participate in the ownership and management of the area's economy. More of the young people are continuing to live and work productively in the area. The economic gap between the races has been narrowed.
- **Sustainable Development** We are achieving these goals in a manner that invests for the long haul, that is not detrimental to our limited clean air, water and countryside, that preserves the region's high quality of life and that meets "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Indeed, this is what today's residents of the ACE Basin wish to do. We want to thank God, nature, and our ancestors for the riches that they have bequeathed us by handing over this sacred trust to future generations.

Guiding Values

To succeed in achieving this vision, we must choose actions that are guided by a clear sense of the values that we seek to support and enhance in our community.

They include:

- **Expanding Opportunity** We must ensure that our development agenda benefits all – creating a range of job opportunities, aimed at the most and the least-skilled, both within and outside the ACE Basin.
- **Increasing Self-Sufficiency** We must ensure that our community develops in such a way that we encourage enterprise, responsibility, and ownership – thus reinforcing the independence that characterizes rural America. We must create more family-wage jobs so that the numbers of our poor decrease and all have the opportunity to live as the middle-class.
- **Preserving Our Heritage** We must ensure that we maintain our traditions, our values and the quality of our cultural environment as we pursue ways to compete better in our changing global economy.
- **Conserving The Environment** We must ensure that the development projects that we propose and implement do not, at a minimum, undermine the quality of the local environment. Moreover, we wish that some of our initiatives go beyond this basic standard and actually reduce environmental threats and demonstrate more sustainable use of natural resources.

Our development plans cannot solely rest on our hopes and dreams. They also must be grounded in our realities. The next section helps to do just this by answering questions like: How does this community stack up against its competitors? From where has its economy come? What is happening to it? What are its critical challenges?

Nature-based tourism offers significant opportunities to broaden the region's economy. Photo by Cherle Pittillo.



HOW DOES THIS COMMUNITY RATE?

*I*n order to ensure that this development planning effort did not set off in a wrong direction, the community asked its consultants, CFED, to provide an independent view on the area by putting together a data profile and by talking to local residents about the region's development past, present and prospects.

More specifically, this analysis was designed to be used in three ways. The first is to help the people of Colleton County and the ACE Basin to develop a shared idea of where the community is today. All too often, communities stumble early on in the planning process, because residents have very different ideas about what the community's problems are. By providing its planning effort with some basic economic, social and environmental data, the consultants hoped to paint a broad picture of where the area's economy is today – a picture that would be used by the county's residents as a resource in building a shared idea of the key issues and problems facing the community. This was how the data

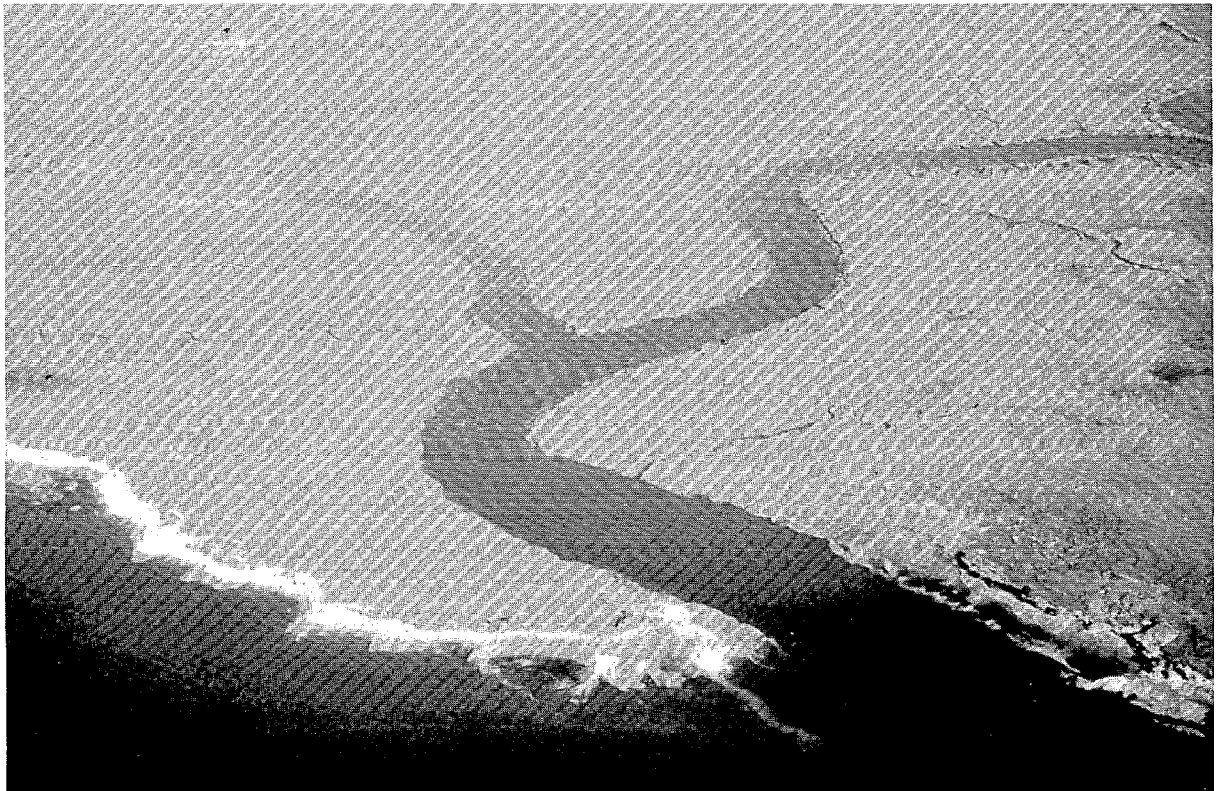
were principally used in the original retreat, which selected the task group areas upon which to focus.

Second, the community's view may be colored by myths which should be dispelled by more accurate information. The analysis can help here as well.

The third way was as a source of data that can help the steering committee and task group leaders to define and work on specific project planning ideas.

The rest of this section looks at what the quantitative data said about the community's economic and environmental health and what its own citizenry had to say about its development strengths, weaknesses and potential destiny. (For more detail and factual support for the interpretations presented below, readers may want to consult the complete economic and environmental assessments.)

*Extensive salt marshes support an important regional seafood industry.
Photo by Jeff Lepore.*



Colleton's Economic Health

In order to fully assess how well Colleton stacked up against its peers, CFED conducted comparisons of Colleton County to South Carolina and United States averages, 14 similar U.S. counties, regional competitors, and neighboring counties in its regional economy.³ It looked at:

- **Economic Status** – How well is the community's economy performing? In other words, how well is the economy doing its job of offering people the opportunity for a better life?
- **Business Vitality and Trends** – How vital are the community's businesses? What are the businesses that compose the area's economy? How dynamic and adaptive and strong are they?
- **Development Capacity** – How strong is the community's ability to provide the resources needed by businesses in today's global economy? Are the resources in place to fuel and sustain economic growth over the long term?
- **Competitive Positioning** – How equipped is the overall economy to meet today's development challenges?

Economic Status

In comparison to South Carolina and the U.S., Colleton's economy is not performing well:

- Colleton has a higher percentage of people living in poverty, and average income is only two-thirds of the U.S. average.⁴
- Employment growth has been slow and unemployment high since the early 1990s.⁵
- The gap between rich and poor may be widening as income from dividends, interest and rent has increased while income from wages and salaries has decreased.⁶

This may be a product of still being a rural county – when compared to 14 other similar counties, Colleton actually does fairly well:

- Colleton has fewer poor (only four of the other 14 rank better in poverty).⁷
- Income is average for a rural area.⁸
- The employment and earning outlook is moderately good (notably, ranking fourth best in unemployment).⁹

Colleton's mixed quality of life and population growth may be cause for cautious optimism. Let's look at quality of life:

- It is not as good as the U.S. and South Carolina, but better than many peer counties in the number of doctors per capita, the number of hospital beds per capita, the rate of high school graduation and the low amount of substandard housing.¹⁰
- *But*, the crime rate is higher than most of the other 14 counties, and it is well above South Carolina average in teen pregnancy, the low percentage of mothers receiving prenatal care and the percent of teens who were "idle" (not in school or working).¹¹

What about population growth? Here we find that:

- Meanwhile, contrary to national rural trends, people are moving *into* Colleton.¹²
- *But*, this may be little more than a "bedroom community" effect relating to Charleston. (Of the 15 peers, Colleton had the highest percent of people working outside in another county.)¹³

By far the most disturbing finding is that there are significant economic disparities between blacks and whites which have only worsened in recent years, not improved.

- While poverty for Colleton's whites is 9.5 per cent, it is 40 percent for the county's blacks (much higher than the rates for all blacks in South Carolina and the U.S.) – and the gap has widened since 1980. Meanwhile,

³ [the 15 peer counties] The peer counties were chosen according to 7 criteria: population size (between 18,000-48,000), racial composition (40%-70% White and 30%-60% Black), population density (5-35 persons per Sq. KM), number of farms (240-720), percent income from farms (1-7.5%), manufacturing (15-40%) and services (10-25%).

⁴ 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics, South Carolina, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC.

⁵ The Regional Economic Information System, Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, May 1995.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ The City and County Data Book, Bureau of the Census, Economic and Statistics Division, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, 1994.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ The Regional Economic Information System, Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, May 1995.

¹⁰ The City and County Data Book, Bureau of the Census, Economic and Statistics Division, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, 1994.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics, South Carolina, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC.

almost half (44.9 percent) of all African-American children in Colleton live in poverty.¹⁴

- The gap persists beyond poverty. Whites make more than twice as much as blacks in Colleton – in all of South Carolina white income is 80 percent more than black.¹⁵
- Blacks have a much harder time finding jobs than whites in Colleton. The unemployment rate for whites is barely 2 percent – below “full employment” – while the unemployment rate for blacks is above 10 percent.¹⁶

Business Vitality and Trends

Entrepreneurship, a key component of a vital and dynamic business sector, has been strong in Colleton for the past decade, though it may be weakening:

- People who own a business are doing better in Colleton than those working for others. They are earning more and seeing their earnings increase at a faster rate in the last 10 years.¹⁷
- Colleton’s black- and women-owned businesses employ people at a higher rate than in the rest of the U.S.¹⁸
- There was a large increase in the number of new companies in Colleton, even as the number of new companies decreased in both South Carolina and the U.S. as a whole in the early 1990s.¹⁹

- But in the past five years or so, growth in the number of proprietors and their earnings has slowed to levels near or below S.C. and the U.S. average. Also proprietor growth is not outpacing wage and salary workers anymore.²⁰

The sectoral breakdown of Colleton’s economy shows tendencies to favor low-end, low-tech and low-value-added sectors, with the exception of strength in some manufacturing sectors.

- Services and retail account for over 40 percent of Colleton’s employment, but they have some of the lowest earnings; only farm earnings are lower.²¹
- The two smallest sectors are wholesale trade and



St. Helena Sound’s near shore waters are productive grounds for commercial shrimping. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

¹⁴ The 1980 and the 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics, South Carolina, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC; and South Carolina State Budget and Control Board and the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, *Kids Count*, South Carolina (revised edition: August 1995).

¹⁵ Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC.

¹⁶ South Carolina Employment Security Commission, South Carolina Department of Commerce.

¹⁷ *The Regional Economic Information System*, Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, May 1995.

¹⁸ 1987 Economic Census: Survey of Minority-Owned Business Enterprises and 1987 Economic Census: Women-Owned Businesses, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC.

¹⁹ South Carolina Employment Security Commission, South Carolina Department of Commerce.

²⁰ *The Regional Economic Information System*, Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, May 1995.

²¹ *The Regional Economic Information System*, Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, May 1995.

transportation/communications/public utilities, the two sectors with the highest earnings in Colleton.²²

- The most pronounced growth in the past ten years was in sectors that do not require many specialized skills: retail and wholesale trade, and to a lesser extent, services.²³
- However manufacturing, the third largest sector, follows a different pattern. Although it has consolidated and lost some jobs, compared to the U.S. and S.C., it has seen significant increases in pay and in the number of large establishments.²⁴

Development Resources

Colleton's businesses and industries need access to strong resources to be competitive and innovative:

- A skilled workforce
- Access to high technology
- Adequate financial resources
- Strong, modern infrastructure

Combined with a good quality of life, and a dynamic and entrepreneurial business sector, resources can pave the way to increased economic well-being – for all Colleton's citizens. But, like its economic performance and quality of life, Colleton's resources are mixed. Let's look first at its resource weaknesses.

Colleton's human resources are poorer than other counties, making it extremely difficult to encourage growth in high-end industries.

- SAT scores are low, and are falling faster than S.C. and the U.S.²⁵
- Few students graduate high school, and very few go on to college.²⁶
- A smaller percentage of adults have graduated from high school or college than in S.C. or the U.S.²⁷

Colleton county's public coffers are low, taking in little revenue, and restricting its ability to invest in itself. Most pointedly Colleton is:

- Last out of 15 peer counties in local government general revenue per \$1,000 of local citizen's income.²⁸
- 10th of 15 in federal funds received per capita (with little improvement).²⁹
- Low in per capita spending, with little growth (14th out of 15) in comparison with the peer counties, but relatively high compared with other rural counties in South Carolina.³⁰

Financial resources are limited, meaning less money to fund new business start-ups and expand existing ones.



A valuable blue crab fishery is found in the salt and brackish water portion of the Basin's rivers. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

²² *ibid.*

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey; telephone conversation May, 1995.

²⁶ 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Social, Economic and Housing Characteristics, South Carolina, Bureau of the Census, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ [the 15 peer counties] The peer counties were chosen according to 7 criteria, population size (between 18,000-48,000), racial composition (40%-70% White and 30% Black), population density (5-35 persons per Sq. KM), number of farms (240-720), percent income from farms (1-7.5%), manufacturing (15-40%) and services (10-25%).

Local Government revenue from *The City and County Data Book*, Bureau of the Census, Economic and Statistics Division, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, 1994.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

- Colleton has few banks per capita (11th out of 15 peer counties) and fewer deposits (13th out of 15).³¹

Now, let us examine the area's resource strong points.

Colleton's housing stock is good for a rural county:

- The value of much of Colleton's housing stock is high and getting better compared to peer counties (though low versus the U.S.): out of 15 counties it ranks 4th in median home value and 3rd in the increase in median home value.³²
- But, the picture is not completely rosy, as the county ranks only about average in measures of overcrowding (8th), the percent of units that are substandard (8th), and the percent of homes that are vacant (13th).³³

Colleton's health care resources, though not as strong as those of many urban areas, are very strong for a rural community.

- The county ranks in the middle (8th) in doctors per 100,000 and moderately high (5th) in hospital beds per 100,000 versus peers.³⁴

Hope Plantation and many other privately owned former rice plantations have been perpetually protected through conservation easements. Conservation easements allow compatible uses, including forest management, agriculture and hunting, to continue. Photo by Jeff Lepore.



High quality maritime forests border salt marshes. Photo by Carol Weeks.

Competitive Positioning

Two sets of regional forces are pulling Colleton in different directions. Historical economic and geographic ties to the Lowcountry are strong. Traditionally, Colleton has been grouped with its southern rural neighbors, but it appears to be moving from its agricultural roots. Not many are still farming and those who do are making less and less money.³⁵

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *The Regional Economic Information System*, Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC, May 1995.

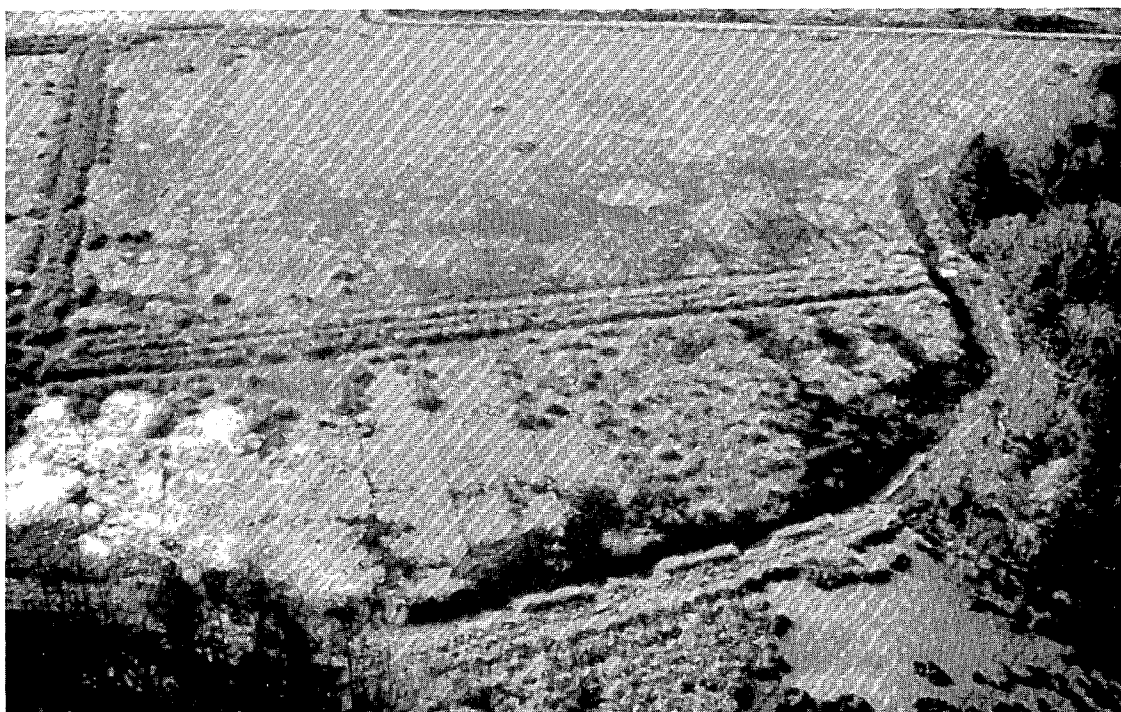
Then, there is the growing relationship to Charleston to the north and that city's growing service-based economy. This evolution is increasingly Colleton's future. The area has strong commuting patterns back and forth between Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester counties – but not with Beaufort and Jasper counties.³⁶ The Charleston region is doing well in terms of jobs and wages in comparison to its competitor regions in spite of the Navy Yard closure.³⁷

However, Colleton has had difficulty in participating in its region's overall economic success. Its employment growth and per capita income are far below the region's. Only strong recent growth in per capita income signals that Colleton may be beginning to reap the benefits of its links.³⁸

Thus, poorer than the rest of South Carolina and the U.S. but better off than many similar counties, Colleton needs to overcome a number of obstacles that characterize traditional rural economies in the South – large racial income and employment disparities, an economy too dependent on low-skill and low-wage jobs, low educational levels, and limited public and private capital resources. Yet, other factors – its entrepreneurial initiative, its strength in particular manufacturing sectors, its economic ties to the growing Charleston economy and its better-than-average health care and housing resources – are forces for progress.



Productive farmland is a valuable asset contributing to the local economy.
Photo by Michael Prevost.



Thousands of acres of former tidewater rice fields, dating from the mid-eighteenth century, are now maintained as important habitat for wetland wildlife. Photo courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service.

³⁶ As seen by the fact that Colleton is linked with Charleston, Dorchester and Berkeley but not with Beaufort and Jasper in calculations for Commuting Zones from the 1990 Census. Available from the Economic Research Service of the US Department of Agriculture. See the Regional Performance Benchmark System (The Corporation for Enterprise Development, 1993) for fuller discussion.

³⁷ Analyzed using data measures of the Regional Performance Benchmark System, which were calculated from employment and earnings data provided by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, US Department of Commerce.

Colleton's Environmental Health

The earlier part of this section provided a fairly detailed snapshot of where the community is today, economically. This part will examine the area's environmental health. Its purpose is not solely to be concerned about public health or habitat protection.

Instead, there are strong and compelling economic development rationales for conducting such an evaluation. Because it is increasingly clear that the health of an area's economy — the level of its water and air pollution, the uniqueness of its local amenities and overall quality of life, and the productivity and vitality of its natural resource assets such as its timber, its soils and agriculture, its wildlife and its fishing grounds — has significant marketplace implications in generating jobs and income.

How do you take the measure of an area's environmental quality and assets? On the surface the answers are simple. Less toxic pollution is better. Less soil erosion is better. Less impaired rivers and streams are better. Fewer nitrates in wells are better. Less polluted shellfish waters are better.

Although the data sources for reaching these conclusions are more meager than the vast information banks of social and economic facts, we can still construct a reasonably accurate and useful picture of environmental health of both Colleton County and the ACE Basin. Now, let's answer a few key questions.

To begin with, why is the ACE Basin important?

This ecological system performs important natural functions and provides direct economic uses:

- Wetlands are natural filters that fight pollution and maintain water quality.
- Wetlands provide natural flood control.
- Wetlands are essential spawning and nursery grounds for recreational and commercial fisheries.
- The ACE Basin provides the timber for commercially important forest products. More than 67 percent of Colleton County's land is timberland, of which 29.2 percent is owned by the forest industry. In 1992, Colleton County had \$24,317,000 in cash receipts, nearly double the receipts of the average South Carolina county.³⁹
- It is a habitat for game (historically up to 14 percent of the dabbling ducks in the Atlantic Flyway overwinter in the Basin)⁴⁰ and for endangered and threatened species (the Basin has the highest concentration of nesting Southern bald eagles in the state)⁴¹ and supports over 30 types of natural plant communities.⁴²

- Its pristine beauty and its variety of plants and wildlife make it a place with great potential for further outdoor recreation, birding, and nature-based tourism development.
- Its unique ecological character creates significant opportunities for environmental research and education.
- The quality and distinctiveness of the Basin's ecosystem is also recognized and acclaimed nationally.

Next, how healthy are its environmental assets?

Colleton County and other ACE Basin counties are placed in the top national and state ranks in:

- **Water Quality** — good supplies of fresh water and low levels of water pollution
- **Forest Resources** — a significant supply of timber and high profitability
- **Fishing Resources** — abundant aquatic life and productive fishing waters, continuing potential for job and income generation
- **Farm Resources** — healthy soils and proper farmland stewardship to minimize erosion

In conclusion, the ACE Basin is recognized, internationally and nationally, as a "world-class" ecosystem. Major progress has been made on conserving the area based on unique partnerships between landowners, conservation organizations, and government agencies. But, to date, Colleton County has yet to make the use of the comparative economic advantage offered by the ACE Basin. However, there is still even a larger challenge: can it do so, without eroding its original advantage — its wonderful natural amenities — as new economic activity is fostered and population size and density increases?

Local Voices

These data findings were confirmed through other, more qualitative research. During the earliest phase of the

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ Percentage of Timberland: USDA Forest Service, Forest Statistics for South Carolina, 1993; Volume of Growing Stock and Sawtimber on Timberland: USDA Forest Service, Forest Statistics for South Carolina, 1993; and Cash Receipts from Forest Products: Clemson University Forestry Department, Value of Forest Products Sold from all of South Carolina Woodlands, 1992.

⁴⁰ Project Plan: The ACE Basin. South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department. August 1989. 22 pp.

⁴¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 1991. Ashepoo-Combahee-Edisto (ACE) Basin National Estuarine Research Reserve in South Carolina. Final Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Management Plan. U.S. Department of Commerce. Washington, D.C. 115 pp.

⁴² ACE Basin Biological Inventory Report 1990-92. 1993. The Nature Conservancy. 36 pp.

Rice field trunks, originally used to manipulate water levels for rice culture, are now used to manage rice fields as waterfowl habitat. Photo by Michael Prevost.



project, our consultants, CFED, did not restrict their work to only number crunching – they also interviewed more than 50 people, seeking their views on the ACE Basin, Colleton County and the future of the area. They spoke to:

- Company owners and plant managers
- Foresters and lumber companies
- Farmers
- Fishermen
- Realtors
- State and federal agencies
- Local politicians and officials
- Conservation organizations
- Tourism and industrial development organizations
- Education leaders
- Business groups
- Landowners
- Community activists

The goals of these conversations were to gather local wisdom about the area from a broad cross-section of the community, to shape the structure of the planning process, to identify initial development priorities and concerns and to help the consultants to better interpret the quantitative data about the area that they were collecting and analyzing. In summarizing their interviews, CFED reached the following conclusions.

ACE Basin: Asset or Liability?

First, the ACE Basin is viewed by the populace as an asset for the following reasons:

- It is a nationally recognized area of unspoiled environment.
- The Basin is regionally important resource for hunting and fishing.
- It is a growing regional tourist attraction.
- The area possesses significant sustainable forestry and marine fishery reserves.
- Successful conservation partnerships between landowners, conservation organizations and government agencies exist in the ACE Basin.

But measures taken so far to protect the ACE Basin are also perceived by some as liabilities, because they may involve:

- The removal of land from the tax rolls
- The reduction of land for development
- An infringement of individual property rights
- Its symbolism of government interference
- The exclusion of local interests
- The possibility for increased environmental regulation

What Do We Have Going For Us?

The ACE Basin also is a direct source of development strength and opportunity. The interviews pointed out that it is:

- An important and emerging regional tourism center – nature-based tourism, historic attractions and an educational center – a creator of local employment and revenues
- A marketing concept – ‘produced in the ACE Basin’
- A symbol of quality of life for industrial attraction to Colleton County
- A preserver of traditional uses of land and natural resources
- A comprehensive teaching laboratory for local schools

The local voices also highlighted the Colleton County's other strengths and opportunities:

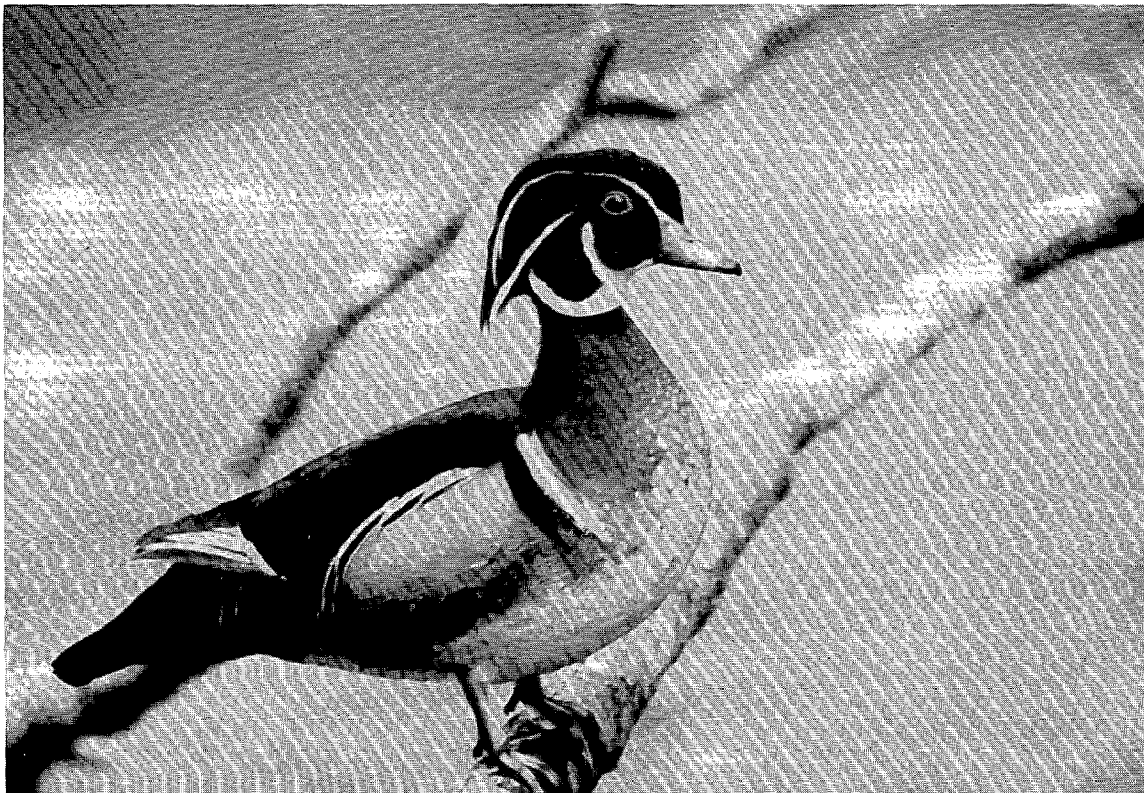
- Nationally successful companies have located in the area.
- It possesses a good labor force – adaptable to modern production methods, with low turnover and absenteeism (but limited by education levels).
- Environmental regulation is effective and efficient – companies did not complain about compliance difficulties.
- The Walterboro Airport and the Industrial Park provide a focus for industrial attraction.
- Local resource-based industries have great untapped potential for developing secondary products and markets.
- Good accessibility is provided by Interstate 95.
- The University of South Carolina-Salkehatchie is an unrecognized educational and economic resource.
- The county school administration is seeking new potential for upgrading area schools.
- The earlier LEAP planning process provided a strong and clear community vision within which to work.
- Leadership Colleton is cultivating new leaders who are looking for new opportunities to make creative things happen.
- Walterboro is an attractive small southern town and sub-regional center.

- The Artisans Center is a successful new initiative that serves both tourism, arts, and educational goals.
- The County Museum is an under-valued resource.

What's Holding Us Back?

The interviews did not pull any punches and described a number of troubling weaknesses, such as:

- Little or no preparation for the expected surge of growth along coastal region in the next two decades – there are no plans to ensure sustainable, long-term benefits.
- Unregulated growth is leading to sub-divisions whose costs exceed tax revenues and to unsightly strip malls.
- Low educational attainment is limiting industrial development and expansion and individual opportunity.
- Community divisions – county versus city, along with racial and income cleavages – might hold the area back.
- Often the community's expectations are too low – they accept being "second best."
- Earlier difficulties in progressing on the Highway 17 expansion show the kinds of divisions that can plague the region.
- The area's limited local financial resources constrain adequate investments in the future.



Wood ducks and other waterfowl in the Atlantic Flyway find critical habitat in the Basin's wetlands. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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e wish to constructively and creatively shape the future rather than leave it to chance. Furthermore, while recognizing that the world is rapidly changing and that we live in turbulent times, we wish to better position our community in the global marketplace, without harming our natural and cultural heritage or breaking with the values and ideals that we cherish.

Earlier in this report, we have wrestled with questions such as: What are we? From where have we come? What is happening to us? What do we want to be? Where can we go?

Now, we wish to shift gears and focus on the key questions: Where should we go? What is our game plan?

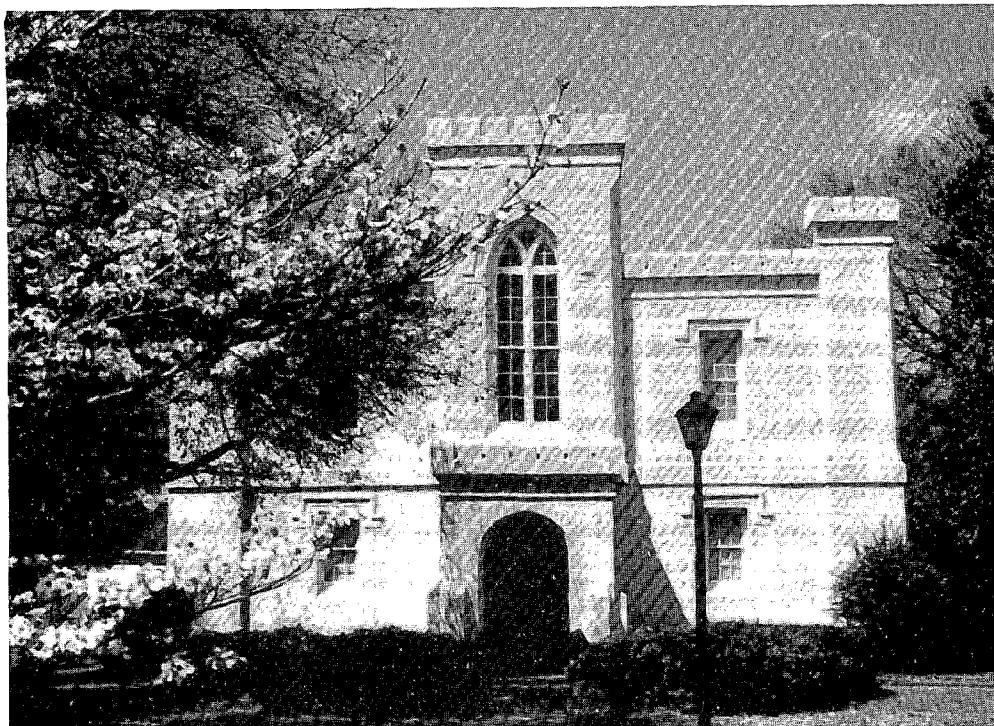
Strategic Priorities

Based on the analysis of the local economy and the changes in the global and regional economy affecting the ACE Basin and Colleton County, it is necessary that the area's leadership tackle three strategic priorities.

- **Strategy One:** Create a framework for responsible growth. A desired future does not just happen: it must be made. Undertaking a comprehensive land use planning process and enacting appropriate ordinances are the best ways to help a community to be what it wants to be and to mesh more effectively its conservation and development goals. By doing so, it can act on its values and heritage, preserve what it cares most about and manage its growth in a more orderly and proactive manner. Likewise, it can help to ensure that its most important economic assets are not sacrificed thoughtlessly through allowing imprudent land uses. Furthermore, by not making these mistakes and setting land use priorities more deliberately and democratically, an area's leadership avoids having its future made "behind its back" by a plethora of small, but significant, decisions. Wise planning can lead to the sort of smarter growth, that generates greater benefits over the long term.
- **Strategy Two:** Enhance the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the ACE Basin. Compared to many other places of great beauty, the ACE Basin is relatively unknown. But by raising its profile as a tourism destination, a quality living environment, and an area with rich cultural traditions, its tourism potential could be increased. However, when it comes to the ACE Basin, strictly speaking, and not just the larger region, these tourism development efforts must also be done in a fashion which does not harm its beauty and its environmental systems. The first steps in putting the Basin on the map are: increasing its visibility through developing environmental and cultural education programs that are offered to residents and outsiders, creating a logo that is on all visitor-oriented materials, making critical investments in destination sites like a visitor/ interpretive center on Highway 17 and undertaking a concerted marketing effort to acquaint tourists with the charm of the region, its accessibility and

White-tailed deer are an important game animal on both public and private lands. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.





The Old Jail, constructed in 1855-1856, now houses the Colleton County Museum, a valuable community asset. Photo by Ron Anton Rocz.

its closeness to other attractions. Quality environmental education in the schools, at the university and at public facilities is needed to ensure that the environmental integrity of the area is maintained.

- **Strategy Three: Promote environmentally compatible business development** Without attracting new firms, fostering new enterprise development and expanding existing businesses, the area cannot generate the jobs and prosperity that its residents need. But the citizens of Colleton County and the ACE Basin want to go beyond the typical development agenda of most communities. We intend for our initiatives to pass two hurdles – the tests of the marketplace and the need to protect the Basin's environmental assets. This requires exploring new strategies to make its traditional natural resource-based industries in agriculture, timber, seafood and local crafts develop higher value-added products and operate in a more sustainable fashion. It means that those who serve today's nature tourists practice what they preach and adhere to the highest standards of environmental stewardship and quality assurance. It entails that all businesses in the region avail themselves of the latest ways that they can cut costs and raise profits by becoming more energy efficient, preventing pollution and cutting waste. Indeed, if properly packaged as a development strategy and not just as a conservation initiative, the environmental and the ACE Basin angles can enhance other traditional development activities, such as marketing sites and the area, attracting infrastructure monies and creating new small business development services.

Action Agenda

The Local Task Groups

The strategies listed above are very broad and can encompass a wide variety of activities. Creating a framework for responsible growth, enhancing the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the ACE Basin and promoting environmentally compatible businesses – each are significant tasks, entailing the mounting of initiatives in a variety of areas.

To identify specific, practical steps the community could take in pursuing each strategy, the community formed four task groups. The task groups covered the following topics:

- **Colleton County Land Use Planning Task Group** (Chair: Donald Lyons, Vice-Chair: I.N. Rizer) The Task Group believes that land use planning can help residents achieve their economic development, quality of life and conservation goals for Colleton County into the next century. The Task Group has asked the Colleton Area Joint Planning Advisory Commission to appoint it as a subcommittee and to request that the County Council endorse the proposed process to develop a land use plan for the County.
- **Value Added Products Task Group** (Chair: Mike Davenport, Vice-Chair: Sandy Watkins) This Task Group sought to create a process that leads to strategies and

Otter Island is a vital component of the National Estuarine Research Reserve. Photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.



programs which will assist residents to create new, or strengthen existing businesses, by adding value to products they market through association with the ACE Basin. Initially, the effort will focus on marine fishing, agriculture and forestry. Later, crafts and other products might be considered. The Task Group believed that the area will derive much more benefit from its natural resource assets if more value was added through developing new products, identifying new markets and exploring trademarking strategies for ACE Basin products that meet a particular quality standard. Although the Task Group looked at a number of promising product ideas, it recommends that more technical feasibility studies be undertaken that would conduct an inventory of resources, both in terms of raw materials and current sectors of involvement of local businesses; and provide a market analysis of each sector to assess environmental compatibility, market size, market growth trends, larger forces that will affect the market (e.g., technology, legislation, regulation, etc.), and competition. Next, it called for the creation of a technical assistance system for helping entrepreneurs successfully launch these new product ideas. Lastly, it proposed additional research on trademarking and other techniques for developing more regional visibility for area products and services.

- **Nature- and Heritage-Based Tourism Task Group** (Chair: Charlie Sweat, Vice-Chair: Denise Simmons) This

Task Group was motivated by an effort to answer the following question: "How can we identify, develop, and promote sustainable economic opportunities in the ACE Basin region, while conserving its natural and cultural values?" Its solution lies with creating a high quality, strategic approach to promoting nature and heritage-based tourism in the area. For instance, a proactive effort will target business development efforts differently in various parts of the region. For example, in the Basin's sensitive natural resource areas, there would be limited infrastructure development, stringent design standards and maximum public use control. But, adjacent to the Basin, there may be moderate development with sensitivity to the Basin's presence and values. In the larger area of influence, there could be more and larger developments and the tie to the Basin would be optional; but development would be still guided by the land use plan and zoning ordinances. Such a strategic approach to developing new tourism products and making necessary infrastructure investments is the best method of ensuring that conservation and development work hand-in-hand.

- **Educational Attainment Task Group** (Chair: Joseph Hamilton, Vice-Chair: Diane Jones) The Task Group looked at educational issues from a variety of angles and proposed that it work with local education and citizen leaders to form an ongoing task group which



The National Estuarine Research Reserve offers valuable learning experiences for young people. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

would collaborate with local schools to develop curricula and programs which educate local students on the history, culture and natural environment of Colleton County and the ACE Basin, and partner with the University of South Carolina at Salkehatchie to develop accredited courses in coastal resources and economic development planning.

Indeed, the Group sees educational action as critical for the fortunes of Colleton and the region for two big reasons. First, education reform and workforce development policies have vaulted to the forefront of America's economic agenda as we come to recognize that the ability of our nation to compete successfully in world markets will depend heavily on the skills and availability of our workers. Given the high level of experimentation underway in every community in the U.S., Colleton County will be left behind if it does not act. However, the Task Group also thought that this was a very large agenda, beyond its ability to affect. Furthermore, with recent ongoing efforts by Leadership Colleton and its alumni to get involved in school issues, that there was no need for an additional initiative at this time. Second, protecting and marketing the ACE Basin, encouraging citizen support of environmentally compatible development and promoting new "green" business and career development all depend on learning the facts about the workings and specialness of coastal ecosystems like the ACE Basin. Enhancing such awareness will contribute mightily to achieving these goals.

Each task group generated a number of useful ideas (in fact, many more than could be undertaken over the next several years). Working from the best or most promising ideas, the task groups generated more specific work plans, in some cases with assistance from CFED. The project steering committee and task group chairs have selected the items that they deemed the highest priorities and that should be implemented in the short term. Within each strategic area, the items are listed in order of their priority, with the first options having the greatest importance.

Based on the work of the task groups, these specific action ideas have been incorporated into an overall work plan, or action agenda, for environmentally compatible economic development. They are summarized in the following table.



High quality recreational fishing opportunities are found throughout the Basin. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

LIST OF STRATEGIES

Strategy one: Create a framework for responsible growth

- Develop a comprehensive land use plan and a supportive ordinance
- Develop an integrated development, tourism, and resource management plan

Strategy two: Enhance the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the ACE Basin

- Develop a visitor/interpretive center in the ACE Basin near US Highway 17
- Support the Scenic Parkway Concept Plan and designation effort
- Develop a consistent ACE Basin graphic identity that would apply to all brochures, maps and other visitor-related materials
- Support a rails-to-trails project
- Develop primary and secondary environmental and heritage education programs
- Develop college courses on coastal resources planning and economic development
- Create educational and awareness programs and materials designed to educate and orient people living in the region about its natural and cultural assets and their value to the region when developed in a sustainable fashion

Strategy three: Promote environmentally compatible business development

- Create a business development planning process and initial business feasibility plans for natural resource-based products
- Create and implement branding and trademarking of area products
- Provide assistance to local businesses in creating business plans and identifying necessary resources to implement those plans
- Develop a full-scale marketing plan for natural and cultural resource-based tourism in the region
- Build on existing rural tourism efforts and assets
- Create management standards for visitor safety and resource impacts for tourism in the ACE Basin
- Mobilize business development resources to benefit Colleton County
- Establish educational programs for businesses operating in the region on how to operate in an environmentally conscious manner with respect to waste management, wildlife impact and other resource considerations



For area students, the Basin is an important community resource. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

Strategy One: Create a Framework for Responsible Growth

- **Develop a comprehensive land use plan and a supportive ordinance for Colleton County** The Task Group explored the desirability of creating a land use plan for the area and concluded that one was needed for the following reasons. Just like any business, communities need to plan for their future so that they can make intelligent decisions about the use of scarce resources and improve their chances of achieving economic prosperity. For instance, land use planning prepares for proper growth. It provides a way for the community to express its aspirations for the future. It promotes sound stewardship of community assets. It identifies priorities for public investment. It manages the fiscal impact of development. It safeguards owner investment against the impact of "bad neighbor" development. It avoids the attraction of unwanted activities rejected by other counties with tighter planning controls. It builds consensus on critical issues, while providing a formal means of resolving disputes between the community and the individual and between development and conservation priorities. The Task Group also chose to undertake a participatory process for developing such a plan, including community forums, visioning and goal setting sessions and public comment hearings. Facilitation and coordination of the process will be accomplished by CFED and the Lowcountry Council of Governments. They will adhere to all required state and local laws, working closely with both the Joint Planning Commission and the Colleton County Council. The plan and zoning ordinance will be finalized by June 1997.

Lead - Colleton Land Use Planning Task Group

Support - Colleton-Walterboro Joint Planning Commission

- Colleton County Council
- Colleton County Resource and Development Board

- **Develop an integrated development, tourism and resource management plan** Such a plan might focus on making a complete inventory of all infrastructure, natural and cultural resources and attractions related to sustainable tourism in the region, using GIS and other technologies where appropriate. It should convene a group of key stakeholders (representatives from local communities, businesses, resource management entities and landowners) to participate in the planning process. It should focus especially on Highway 17 and developing a starting point for exploring the ACE Ba-

Proposed Action Agenda

Based on the initial recommendations of the four task groups and further deliberations within the Steering Committee and with the broader community, we have developed the following action agenda. Many of the task groups also suggested actions that the other groups proposed. For instance, the nature- and heritage-based group called for appropriate land use planning and business development in natural resource-based sectors.

Indeed, there are powerful synergies between the work of each of these task groups and success on one project is likely to have positive benefits on other initiatives. They are organized under their most relevant strategic priority. (Greater detail on many of these options is available in other documents researched and written within this planning process.)

sin. This recommendation directly links with the land use planning efforts, whose interim research products actually answer these questions and will be taking advantage of advanced planning, mapping, and research technologies. So, as its research and data products are completed, a tourism planning and marketing group could use these resources to craft additional development actions.

Lead - Colleton Interpretive Center Committee

Support - S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

- ACE Basin Task Force
- Westvaco Corporation
- Colleton Land Use Planning Group
- Nature and Heritage-Based Tourism Task Group

Strategy Two: Enhance the Awareness, Understanding and Appreciation of the ACE Basin

- **Develop a visitor/interpretive center in the ACE Basin near Highway 17** A plan for siting this center and defining its services needs to be crafted, which would look in detail at a variety of issues, such as accessibility, an ability to withstand high impact, its location near a representative natural resource (e.g. a marsh), it serving as a distribution site for advertising area attractions and the visual appeal of the building and

site. The center also would serve as a focal point for casual visitation, as well as a source of educational and informational materials and programs. It could serve as the control point for organizing visitation to other, more remote and sensitive parts of the Basin. The center also might offer a reservation and transportation service, provide administrative offices for ACE-related education and conservation activities, offer a range of experiences to different types of tourists, have "green" lodging (e.g., low-impact, low density eco-cabins), etc. Satellite visitor facilities might be organized to offer other low-impact experiences at the National Wildlife Refuge headquarters on Grove Plantation, Donnelley and Bear Island Wildlife Management Areas, National Estuarine Research Reserve field station at Bennett's Point, Edisto Beach State Park, and Hunting Island State Park. Design and interpretation would be all coordinated between these sites. Tackling such a large concept would entail working with all major stakeholders, securing land for the central site, addressing the design issues of all the facilities, attracting funding, tapping private investors, conducting further market research, developing exhibits and tie-in education programs, looking closely at the carrying capacity of the sites (how much tourism impact can they take) and using management tools like user fees, visitor permits, timing restrictions, signage, and limiting conveniences and services in some areas to efficiently manage the visitation impacts.

Lead - Colleton Interpretive Center Committee

Support - S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

- ACE Basin Task Force



The Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Trail is a valuable asset in building rural tourism efforts. Photo courtesy of Lowcountry and Resort Islands Tourism Commission.

- Westvaco Corporation
- S.C. Department of Transportation
- Colleton Land Use Planning Task Group

- **Support the Scenic Parkway Concept Plan, developed by Robert E. Marvin and Associates for US Highway 17** Task Group members believe that this plan would greatly enhance eco-tourism efforts in this sensitive region by designating an appropriate portion of highway the "ACE Basin Scenic Parkway." This would help to maintain the area's natural beauty and its healthy environment while still creating a tourism asset that can be marketed to the larger traveling public. A detailed plan for developing this scenic highway has been already written by Robert Marvin and Associates, the nationally-known landscape architecture firm, which is based in Walterboro. Without endorsing every specific recommendation, we believe that the plan is an excellent starting point for larger community-wide discussions and should be studied closely by the comprehensive land use planning effort that is currently underway. The final version of the scenic highway plan must allow for efficient movement of traffic, good highway safety, environmental conservation, and aesthetic preservation and design. Subject to requirements by state and federal law, the Colleton County Council, the South Carolina Department of Highways and Public Transportation and our elected legislative representatives should be asked to enact provisions to establish the ACE Basin Scenic Parkway.

Lead - Colleton Interpretive Center Committee

Support - Colleton County Council

- Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce
- Colleton County Resource and Development Board
- S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
- ACE Basin Task Force
- Westvaco Corporation
- S.C. Department of Transportation
- Colleton Land Use Planning Task Group

- **Develop a consistent ACE Basin graphic identity that would apply to all brochures, maps and other visitor-oriented materials** This would help to establish a link between all tourism options and marketing efforts, as well as establish a unique ACE signature. It should be an "early bird" action.

Lead - Value Added Products Task Group

Support - ACE Basin Task Force

- Lowcountry Resort Islands and Tourism Commission
- Nature and Heritage-Based Tourism Task Group

- **Support a rails-to-trails project** The Lowcountry Council of Governments and the Colleton County Council have worked together on submitting a proposal for a federal grant. This proposed project would entail the creation of a bicycle and footpath along an old railway line between Walterboro and Green Pond. If constructed, it would be a new tourism asset for the region to market, as well as connect tourism opportunities in the town more closely with options in the ACE Basin.

Lead - Lowcountry Council of Governments

Support - Colleton County Council

- Colleton County Resource and Development Board
- Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce
- S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

- **Develop primary and secondary environmental and heritage education programs** The ACE Basin and the surrounding region are rich in both cultural and environmental resources, which are presently unrecognized and underutilized by the education community. Significant opportunities exist to develop new public education programs in area schools and universities which would better acquaint local students and teachers with the area's important ecological, cultural and historic assets. A working group involving the Colleton County School District, the University of South Carolina-Salkehatchie campus, the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, the National Estuarine Research Reserve Program and The Nature Conservancy has been created to fundraise, to develop a series of program offerings and to test them during the next year. It is expected that, when successful, these educational and field trip offerings will help to create a deeper understanding of the region's natural and cultural heritage and enhance educational options for K-12 and college students.

Lead - S.C. Department of Natural Resources

Support - University of South Carolina - Salkehatchie

- Colleton County School District
- The Nature Conservancy
- Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce Education Committee
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- **Develop college courses on coastal resources planning and economic development** Increasingly, the development and conservation communities and professions feel the need to learn each other's business and to discover new ways that "win-win" solutions to development and environmental conflicts can be found. The university could offer new courses in each of these fields and develop a curriculum that synthe-

sizes a new framework for implementing environmentally compatible development planning and initiatives.

Lead - University of South Carolina - Salkehatchie

Support - S.C. Department of Natural Resources

- Colleton County School District
- The Nature Conservancy
- Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce Education Committee

- **Create educational and awareness programs and materials designed to educate and orient people living in the region about its natural and cultural assets and their value to the region when developed in a sustainable fashion** Program delivery might occur through community workshops, schools, field trips, and eco-research internships and volunteer efforts. (See environmental education options above for further details)

Lead - S.C. Department of Natural Resources

Support - University of South Carolina - Salkehatchie

- Colleton County School District
- The Nature Conservancy
- Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce Education Committee
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Strategy Three: Promote Environmentally-Compatible Business Development

- **Create a business development planning process and initial business feasibility plans for natural resource-based products** This would be a multi-step process, entailing an inventory of current involvement of area businesses in natural resource-based activities, an examination of the market potential and environmental effects of each major sector, and the evaluation of these results relative to local resource capability. The local task group has already done some preliminary work in this area by looking at ideas like creating or attracting a processing plant to facilitate packaging and shipping of all products of the ocean and rivers, developing and marketing indigenous products (e.g., joggling boards, rice field trunk models and sweet grass baskets), assisting existing farms that already own their own packaging operations to better market their products, helping expand the supply and demand for blue crabs and South Carolina oysters, developing aquaculture and mariculture products, creating a research kitchen and incubator for new food products and expanding the fuel market for wood chips. Next, it entails developing an analytical process that can be used to assist local firms in evaluating the options for getting involved in attractive business sectors and new product lines. The process would help them to look



Nature trails are available on Donnelley Wildlife Management Area as well as other public access areas. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

at and evaluate: the environmental implications in specific business ventures (each must be, at minimum, environmentally neutral); the market attractiveness of the products in terms of consumer interest and volume/profit potential; the relationships of the product to the image of the ACE Basin; and the ability of local businesses to produce necessary quantities with acceptable quality.

Lead - Colleton County Resource and Development Board

Support -Value Added Products Task Group
-The Nature Conservancy

- **Create and implement branding and trade-marking of area products** High on the priority list should be the exploration of branding and trademarking of products. Doing this well will be very difficult, but it could be a valuable tool in marketing products and identifying them, as well as the ACE Basin, as unique and of high quality.

Lead - Colleton County Resource and Development Board

Support -Value Added Products Task Group
-The Nature Conservancy

- **Provide assistance to local businesses in creating business plans and identifying necessary resources to implement those plans** There are a variety of resources within the region, the state and the nation which can be tapped for providing high quality technical assistance to promising firms and venture ideas. This also should include creating management procedures for businesses to use to measure performance against plan and provide for a continuing relationship between the business and advisor. By doing so, the program would build-in stronger quality control and help these entrepreneurs deal with the inevitable problems facing all startup, young and small firms.

Lead - Colleton County Resource and Development Board

Support -Value Added Products Task Group
-The Nature Conservancy

- **Develop a full-scale marketing plan for natural and cultural resource-based tourism in the region** As the first projects are implemented, the area will have much more to promote. A well-developed marketing plan to better position the area for competing for the tourist dollar will then be needed.



*Wading birds, such as the great egret, are commonly observed in wetlands throughout the Basin.
Photo by Cherie Pittillo.*

Lead - Colleton County Resource and Development Board

Support -Value Added Products Task Group
- Nature- and Heritage-Based Tourism Task Group
- The Nature Conservancy
- S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

- **Build on existing rural tourism efforts and assets** Colleton County and the ACE Basin are already in the forefront of South Carolina's rural, heritage and nature tourism efforts. Its Edisto River Canoe and Kayak Commission was recently honored for its outstanding rural tourism program. They have created the state's first canoe and kayak trail, initiated an annual Edisto Riverfest and offer nearly two dozen guided canoe trips per year for the general public. The area holds a yearly Rice Festival and the ACE Basin Triathlon. An Artisans Center has been built and is putting the area

on the map regarding crafts. Furthermore, many of its leaders are actively working with the state's South Carolina Heritage Corridor project.

There are a number of ways that the region and Colleton County could build on its current accomplishments and on-going programs. For instance, its tourism leadership should consider developing further the Edisto River and Kayak trail. With help with other state and regional partners, it could create a multifaceted recreational river corridor by developing additional recreational opportunities along the river, while still protecting the natural and scenic quality of the Edisto River. Earlier analysis by the state government has demonstrated that the Edisto possesses high quality inland fisheries, natural features, flatwater boating, wildlife habitat, water quality, backcountry boating, and recreational fishing. Doing this right requires convening an active community and regional planning group that would develop ideas for creating additional campsites, developing a series of inns situated near some parts of the river, a canoe livery, further landings and so on. For this sort of large effort, the community would need to work closely with South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism (PRT) and other relevant agencies and additional monies would need to be raised to cover technical planning costs and the required infrastructure improvements. Such an effort could put Colleton in a leadership position in terms of developing new eco-tourism activities within the Heritage Corridor initiative.

Lead - Nature and Heritage-Based Tourism Task Group
Support - S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

- Westvaco Corporation
- Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce

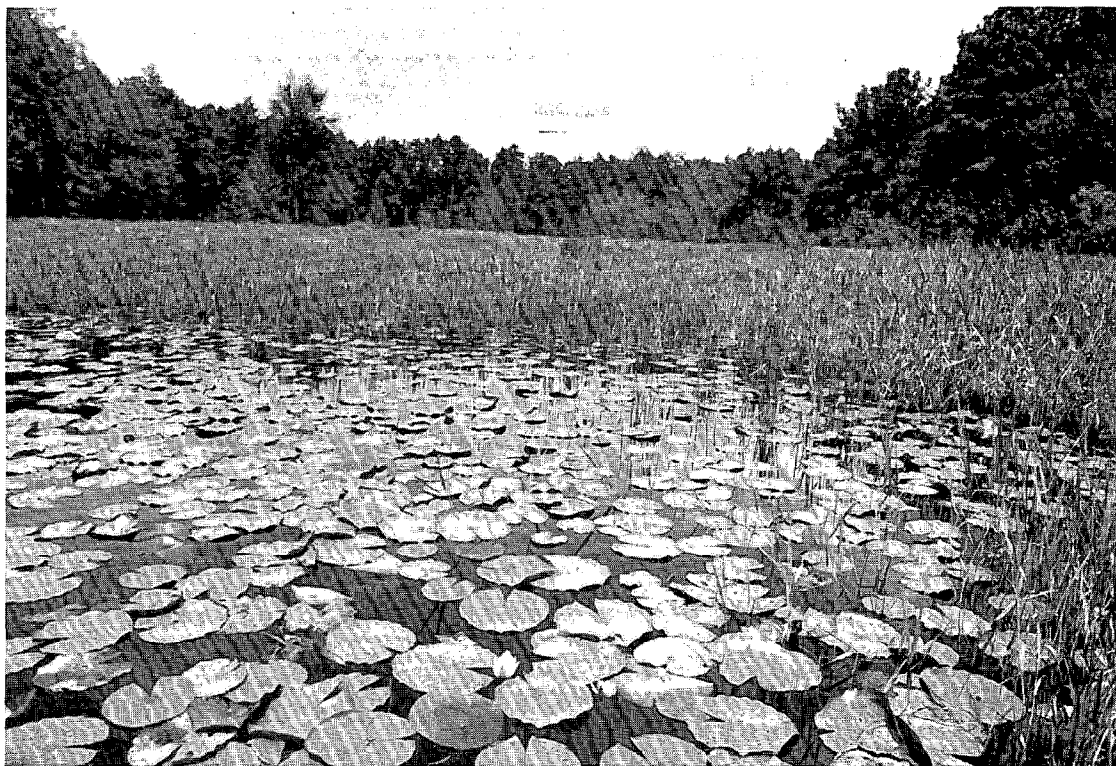
- **Create management standards of visitor safety and resource impacts for tourism in the ACE Basin** The South Carolina Nature-Based Tourism Association has already developed guidelines for operating tourism activities and businesses in a manner that will not degrade an area's natural and cultural resources. This work needs to be built on and applied more specifically to the ACE Basin region so that the tourism industry adheres voluntarily to the highest standards of ethics, visitor safety, stewardship and quality assurance in educational and interpretation programs.

Lead - South Carolina Nature Based Tourism Association

Support - S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism

- ACE Basin Task Force
- Nature and Heritage-Based Tourism Task Group

- **Mobilize business development resources to benefit Colleton County** The Colleton County Resource and



Freshwater wetlands provide vital wildlife habitat and support natural plant communities. Photo courtesy of SC Department of Natural Resources.

Development Board and a variety of other organizations are active on a number of development fronts, covering topics such as downtown revitalization in Walterboro, business recruitment, quality of life improvements, tourism and crafts development. Each of these arenas provides scope for new ways of thinking and marketing and new project development in the light of this planning process. Indeed, development professionals across the U.S. are focusing more energies on areas of "synergy" between previously separated development efforts, like tourism, business retention and expansion, industrial attraction, tourism development, downtown development, and so forth. Briefings of these groups about the report should be held. The managers of ongoing development programs should think about how their activities could benefit from the success of this plan, how they could be supportive of its agenda, and what additional complementary efforts they could undertake.

For instance, the area might consider cross-training business recruitment, tourism marketing, and hospitality-based businesses in marketing the area to prospective business, residents, and tourists. Likewise, the business recruitment effort should consider how it might target companies and market the area differently in the light of this larger plan. Similarly, new companies often need help in a variety of areas, ranging from putting together a sound business plan to marketing, from tax and permit issues to accessing appropriate financing. How might support systems for starting and growing new companies be expanded? How might additional attention be focused on self-employment and minority enterprise development? What more is needed to keep and expand existing firms? What additional investments in business development infrastructure — such as industrial parks, small business incubators, a revolving loan fund, etc. — might be required to realize the full potential of this strategy document? The report could be a cata-

lyst for these types of reflections, for additional action planning, and for new fund-raising activities by area development and civic improvement groups. In fact, other communities have found that an action plan like this makes an effective statement to funders that this area "means business" — that it is well organized, possesses a good working consensus, thoughtfully takes action, and has a business plan that sets development priorities for the future.

Lead - Colleton County Resource and Development Board

Support - Walterboro-Colleton County Chamber of Commerce

- **Establish educational programs for businesses operating in the region on how to operate in an environmentally conscious manner with respect to waste management, wildlife impact, and other resource considerations** For example, the state of North Carolina's Office of Waste Reduction provides assistance along these lines. It often targets its services on a countywide basis, offering training and technical assistance in pollution prevention in local manufacturing firms, waste reduction for city governments, locates markets for recyclable materials and helps companies find and utilize recycled materials. A similar partnership could be structured with relevant South Carolina agencies and experts at Clemson University and at the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC).

Lead - Walterboro-Colleton Chamber of Commerce

Support - University of South Carolina - Salkehatchie
 - Clemson University
 - S.C. Department of Natural Resources
 - South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
 - Colleton County Resource and Development Board

CONCLUSION

*P*rogress on this ambitious agenda will not happen overnight. But to succeed, we need to get going today on those initiatives that need to be implemented first, as well as show early results on some of our longer-range goals.

If we are to accomplish our objectives of winning in the marketplace and also preserving our area's quality of life, we need to work together. This plan is not the agenda of one segment of the community — it *is* and *must* be **our** game plan.

Compatible development, furthermore, happens when real partnerships are created and a community mobilizes more of its problem-solving and creative potential. In an era when local prosperity requires expanding the supply of availability of capital for industry, developing a highly-skilled and flexible workforce, pro-

viding an adequate and up-to-date infrastructure, preserving an area's environmental assets, and improving a community's quality of life, economic development is no longer the sole domain of the local Chamber of Commerce or county government or an industrial recruiter. These organizations have neither the time nor the resources to address the range of needs and opportunities in a rural community. Rather, economic development is everybody's business, from the local minister, banker,

forester and school principal to the teacher, county extension agent, farmer and small businessperson. Each can play a role in creating the foundations for a better economic future in the ACE Basin and in Colleton County.

We need your help. Our agenda for promoting compatible economic development requires building a new partnership for economic opportunity and for quality of life.

Join us.



The bald eagle is a common fall and winter resident. Photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy.

PARTICIPANTS

The following is a list of participants in the ACE Basin Economic Forum's Strategic Plan.

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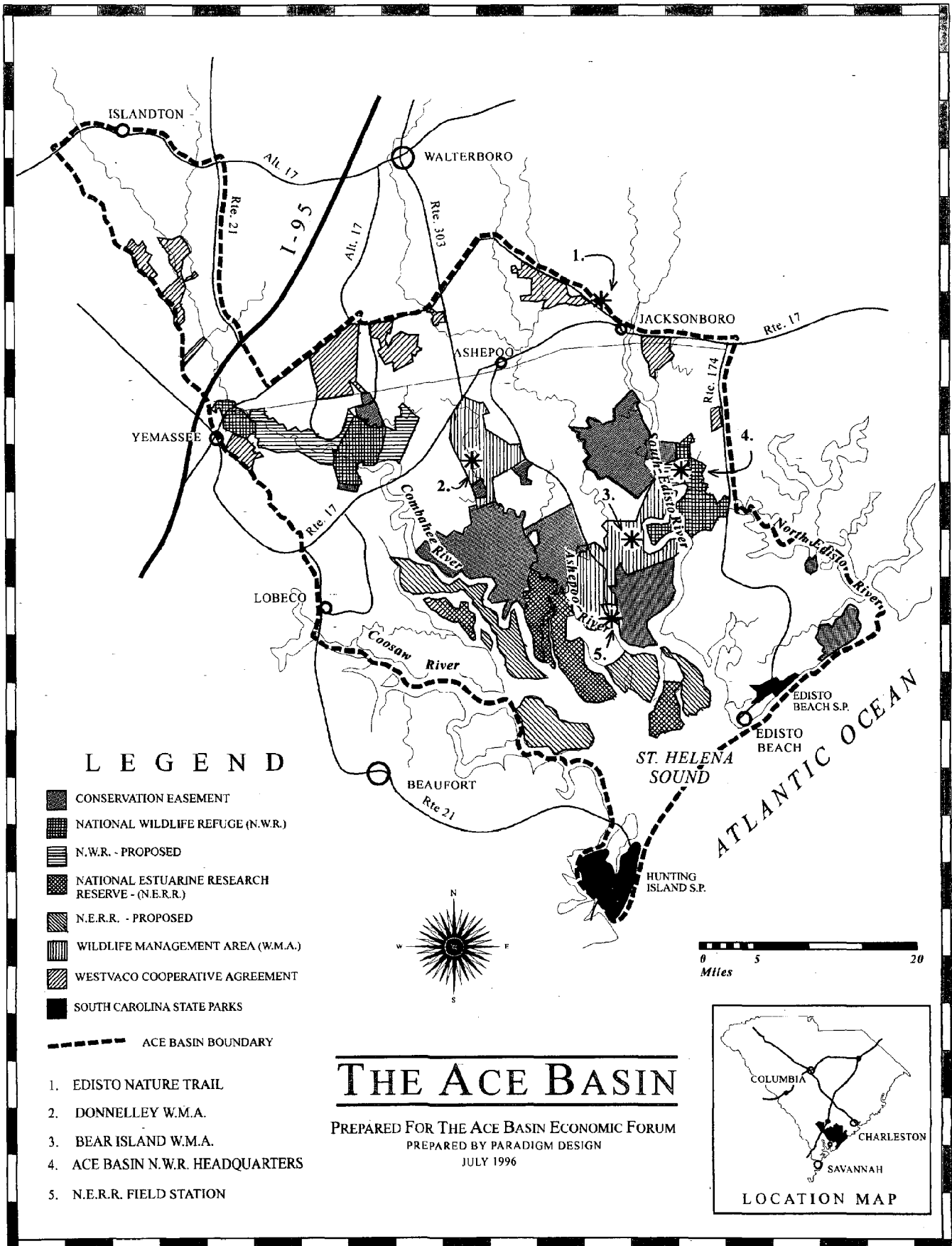
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